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SOME
METHODS OF TEACHING GEOGRAPHY.*

By the Rev. F. R. Burrows, M.A.,

Ancaster House School, St. Leonard's-on-Sea.

We are met together to consider how far wecan benefit one another by the exchange of opinions and the reading of papers in the matter of our relation to children. As parents we have given to us for a portion of our lives the direction, if not the control, of our childrens' education, and we must neither acquiesce tamely in every suggestion made from outside, nor refuse, as the manner of some is, every suggestion that comes from others, because we know our own business best. With regard to the training of children at a very early age, no one can speak with greater authority than women, because they in the nature of things come across the young the most. With regard to their development at later stages, parents and teachers seem to me to share the responsibility; teachers being able to compare children one with another as no parent can, and being also able to watch them amongst their school-fellows, who elicit qualities good and bad unsuspected at home. Amongst other means of training children for fitness to take their place in the world we consider Education, so called, or as children would say "Lessons," an important factor, and the difficult thing is in the limited time given to such training to choose subjects which shall in the truest sense of the word "Educate." Whether we are right in aiming at conveying knowledge that will at once pay in examinations, or in endeavouring to give accomplishments, I will not attempt to say, because I know how strong is the temptation, and how much pressure is put upon us; but what I do feel very strongly is that we have in one subject, and that a neglected one, a powerful instrument

* Lecture delivered at the Hastings and St. Leonard's College for Ladies, February 22nd, 1896, on behalf of the Parents' National Educational Union, Southdown Branch.

for opening the eyes of the children to the world around them, and one which leads so naturally to many other subjects required in education, that I think it deserves our respectful attention and consideration. I believe that studies of history, natural science, and of languages, start naturally from Geography (when it is intelligently taught and learnt, as I shall try to describe), and in riper years fall into their natural places. "Perhaps such a dream of education may long remain a dream, but it may help us to realize the worth of Geography, and to look on the study of it in a grander as well as a more rational light than has commonly been done." (J. R. Green.)

First let me call an ideal teacher as witness.

Thomas Arnold, Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford, and Head Master of Rugby, delivered in 1842 a set of lectures on modern history. In the third lecture he said as follows:—"A real knowledge of Geography embraces at once a knowledge of the earth and of the dwellings of man upon it; it stretches out one hand to history, and the other to geology and physiology: it is just that part in the dominion of knowledge where the students of physical and of moral science meet together. Let me once understand the real Geography of a country, its organic structure if I may so call it; the form of its skeleton, that is, of its hills; the magnitude and course of its veins and arteries, that is, of its streams and rivers; let me conceive of it as of a whole made up of connected parts; and then the position of man's dwellings, viewed in reference to these parts, becomes at once easily remembered, and lively and intelligible besides."

This passage is followed by a brilliant exposition of the meaning of the lie of the land in Italy, as illuminating the history of that country, but too long for quotation here. Dr. Arnold was the man who led the way in the reform of our great schools, and I claim him as the pioneer in the reformation of Geographical Teaching. It would be a good thing if all those who have followed him in the first crusade had followed him in the second. No one else has defined with such accuracy the real power of Geography to illuminate study, and it is not every one who has the loyalty to his memory that the Dean of Westminster had, who wrote his life, and who replied to Mrs. Arnold when congratulated by

her on the success of his book "Sinai and Palestine," "The framework of the book is the result of that sense of the connection of History and Geography which I have never ceased to enjoy since it was first imparted at Rugby."

The names of Stanley and Arnold are not omnipotent but they are potent. I appeal to them on the threshold of my address, so that we may feel that we are encouraged by such masters in education—education in a wide sense. I will not call them witnesses for the defence, for no one has attacked Geography; nor for the prosecution, lest any think I wish to stir up strife; but let me call them witnesses.

We regard the Parents' National Educational Union as a body which desires to learn how to do better. It has meetings which consist of a paper or speech followed by discussion. The subjects which occupy its attention are mainly concerned with children. The subject of to-day I call a neglected subject, because I have found it such in two public schools in which I have taught, also when preparing young men for the army, and now when teaching young boys in a preparatory school. Fifteen years ago I wrote as follows: "The science which describes the surface of the earth, and its relations to the other members of the solar system, deserves to be more accurately studied than is usually the case. We generally find modern Geography neglected in schools, and ignored at Universities."* Things are better now, but I have a feeling that a great deal has yet to be done before the study of Geography takes its proper place. "It is one which must occupy a foremost place in any rational system of primary education. When the prejudices and traditions of our schools and schoolmasters have passed away—as they must pass away before a truer conception of the growth of a child's mind, and of the laws which govern that growth—the test of right teaching will be found in the correspondence of our instruction with the development of intellectual activity in those whom we instruct." (J. R. Green.)

"In the days of our fathers the ancient classics were the common element in the culture of all men, a ground on which the specialists could meet. The world is changing, and it would seem as if the classics were becoming a speciality.

* "Specimen Essays," No. VII., p. 30, Fifth Edition.

It is our duty to find a substitute. To me it seems that Geography combines some of the requisite qualities. To the practical man, whether he aim at distinction in the state or the amassing of wealth, it is a store of invaluable information; to the student it is a stimulating basis from which to set out along a hundred special lines; to the teacher an implement for the calling out the powers of the intellect." (Mackinder.) Such are the opinions of the most popular historian of our time, and of the Oxford University Reader in Geography; the one dealing with the teaching of the subject to quite young children; the other pleading for its recognition as an element of cohesion in further education. To both these points I desire to address myself.

Now with regard to the teaching of young children. The subject of Geography has to do with the youngest children. Let me again quote from Mr. Green:—"The child's first question is about the material world in which it finds itself. So long as every sight and every sound is an object of wonder, and of the curiosity that comes of wonder, life will be a mere string of '*whats*' and '*whys*.' With an amusing belief in the omniscience of his elders, the child asks why the moon changes, and what are the stars; why the river runs, and where the road goes to; why the hills are so high, and what is beyond them. To answer these questions as they should be answered, is to teach the little questioner Geography. The name of *Physical* Geography may never reach him, but he gets a notion of what the earth's form actually is, of the distribution of land and sea, of the relative position of continents and of countries, of the 'why' rivers run, and the 'where' roads run to. As he watches how mountains divide men or rivers draw them together; how hill-line and water-parting become bounds of province and shire; how the town grows up by the stream and the port by the harbour-mouth, the child lays the foundation of *Political* Geography, though he never may see 'a table of counties' or learn a list of populations. Studied in such a fashion as this, Geography would furnish a ground-work for all after-instruction"—and it is with a view to encourage parents to give their children such a vantage-ground that this subject has been chosen. We are met on the threshold by the difficulty of teaching little children as they

ought to be taught such a subject as Geography. Let us consider the matter. We must be willing to learn for our children and with our children, and we have no right to decline to teach them anything because we do not understand it. We may dismiss from our minds the conventional Geography book. "No drearier task can be set for the worst of criminals than that of studying the Geographical text books such as children are condemned to use." And we may dispense with maps also, as far as regards the children, until they ask for them, though never for ourselves. It is not, I can assure you, a repulsive subject. We talk of fairyland to the children, and they believe in it. There need be no fear of not finding a fairyland in Geography. Father is smoking a pipe. "Why does father smoke? Answer difficult. Because he likes it. That is a question of ethics. Where does he get the stuff from? The shop. Where does the shop man get the stuff from? From America. Where is America? Over the sea. Which sea? That way to the west. Which is west? There are four ways you can go—to the north, to the south, to the east, to the west (draw this on a piece of paper). Then the man sends to the west for the stuff? Yes. Does it grow like that? No. What is it like? It is a plant. Show me where it grows? (You find America on a globe.) Is that a long way off? Yes. Is it further than Eastbourne? Yes. How long does it take to get there? Altogether about a week. Oh! are there any other places as far off? Yes; China. Where is China?—(Globe again). Why is this thing round? The earth is round. Like a ball? Yes. Oh! how do we live on a ball? It is always spinning round so fast that we never notice it. Round what? Round the sun.—(Pause). Then the ball has one side to the sun sometimes, and the other side sometimes? Yes. Is that why it is dark? Yes. Oh! but, mother, tell us about America. Is it like England? No; it is a very big country. Is it hot or cold? Up there very cold; then like England; then very hot. Why?" The wise mother thinks that is enough. "But, mother, tell us all about America another day. Won't you?" And the wise mother resolves to find out something more about America, and she does tell them another day. What is the result? Do all the facts remain? Not all, but a great many. Children *will* talk over things. As you have many things

about which to think they have few. The next move will be that the doll will be put in the box of bricks; the bricks will be made to look like a steamer, and the steamer with the doll will cross the nursery floor to fetch stuff for father to smoke from "Merica" (not A-merica, but THE-merica I heard it once explained), and the plant will grow in the corner by the fire, and (probably it is the doll's petticoat) be brought back in triumph, and let us hope not set on fire by a stolen match. And the best of it is that it is all real, not make-believe. Another peep into fairyland. "We can't go because it is raining." *Mother, why does it rain?* It comes from the clouds, and they come from the sea. Does the sea come down in rain? Yes. Where does the rain go to? To help to make rivers. Do the rivers go to the sea? Yes. How do they go? They find the easiest way to the sea, if they cannot go over a stone they go round it; and the earth is all over valleys. What are valleys, mother? Well, once upon a time the earth was soft and hot, and then it grew cold and hard outside, and it dried into lumps and hollows, and the lumps are the hills, and the hollows the valleys, and the river must run down so it goes down to the sea and along the lowest places till it gets there. Are there any rivers near here, mother? Yes; would you like to go and see one when it is fine? And see how it runs? Are there big rivers, mother? Very big; so that you cannot see the other side. Show us where there are big rivers. And so with a little patience and a little knowledge the naughty rain that keeps us in makes a little text for a sermonette, and without dragging in knowledge in season and out of season, we have opportunity after opportunity of teaching real Geography, not Geography falsely so-called. It is the natural starting point for all the subjects of later training. A teacher labours doubly for the most part, because it is necessary to begin at the very beginning, when home-training might send out children, at all events, well grounded in something; and I venture to suggest to all thinking parents that that something in the lifelong interests of their children had better be Geography. I am endeavouring to provide the anxious parent with mind-matter for the feeding of their children, as important as their being fed with body-matter. I believe the childish digestion capable of assimilating such teaching as I have suggested, and I

think we are *all* quite as competent to teach in such a way, as to teach Arithmetic, French, Latin, or Music; and I am not aware that any of these subjects flows with such ease from the Bible, with which our little children are familiar, I hope, from their very infancy, as Geography. We begin with the child Jesus, I presume, and show them pictures of Him as He lived and moved, and it is not long before we are asked why He wore those clothes; and each incident in the Gospels, from the teaching in the Temple to the trial before Pilate, brings in unknown and strange facts. How can we understand the Roman soldier, the garment rent in twain, the taxing of Cæsar, without a constant reference to Geography? And if our children ask us of the beginning of things, can we not help them to understand the account of Creation by a simple lesson in the earth's early history? God was preparing a home for man, we say, and first of all it was all dark—the waters covered the earth—there was no dry land. So He made the light, and it is shining still; and He drew off the waters into the seas, and they are still where He put them, sometimes rough with the storm, and sometimes calm; and He made the dry land appear, as the waters went down, to be a home for man. He made the plants to grow, and they made the earth fit for animals to live upon, and the plants were food for animals until God made man, who was to live upon the animals who feed upon the plants, who in their turn feed upon the light. I have just been comparing an address on the Principles of Geography, delivered by Dr. Hugh Mill in Dundee in 1891, with the first chapter of Genesis, and allowing for scientific terms found in the later description, I can see no essential difference. One cannot read that first chapter of the Bible without the aid of Geography, in its widest sense, to explain it, and as an inspired account of that which was before man was I believe we may claim it as an ideal lesson in Geography,—by which I mean that the circumstances are arranged in order, each leading on to each in an evolution grander than any other evolution, because it is the Master Architect revealing His design. I am sure that the simplicity of the words appeals to our children, and that taken verse by verse it makes the grandest introduction to the study of the Bible, for which purpose indeed it was written; and the child

who has learnt that chapter with intelligence and love,—who finds that the heavens above, the waters around him, and the very earth beneath his feet, are *as* God meant them to be, and *because* God meant them to be,—will look with reverence on his globe or his map in after years. *The teaching of God must not be left to childrens' services, nor relegated to Sunday.* If He has taught us in the Bible, He has also surrounded us with facts which witness to Him, and those facts are nowhere to be found in more profusion than in the tides which wash our shores, those hills and valleys which make up our landscapes, those showers which nourish our fields and fill our streams,—in a word, those surroundings of man in his earthly home which Geography describes, and for which she lives and moves and has her being.

I am told that the horizon-line is nearer or farther off according as I stand upon a plain, or I ascend a height. I would desire, for the little children, that they should ascend as high as possible to see as far as possible. They may be taken along so many lanes, and between so many high hedges, that they arrive at manhood with only a sensation of dusty boots. There must be an elevation of view point before we arrive at an elevation of character, and with earnestness I plead that they may be allowed a good look round. I would ask that the words of John Richard Green should be thought over: "Geography is the natural starting point for all subjects of future training."

To be continued.)